DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 248 294 UD 023 778

AUTHOR Moses, Yolanda T.
TITLE Socialization and Non-Traditional Gender Roles: The Black Woman. Draft.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the meetings of the American Anthropological Association (Washington, DC, 1982).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black Family; *Blacks; *Females; *Nontraditional Occupations; Role Conflict; *Self Actualization; Self Concept; *Sex Role; Social Attitudes; *Socialization

ABSTRACT

This paper explores socioeconomic and cultural conditions that predispose black women to choose paths to non-traditional gender roles and life choices more often than white women. Acknowledged is a need for scholars and researchers to look at the lives of black women, not from the dominant, white, male-centered scholarship model but from the social and cultural perspective of black women's lives and environments. Part I reviews selected socialization literature on blacks and raises questions about the validity of using one single body of scholarship to explain the diversity of black socialization patterns. Part II explores the direct relationships between socialization patterns for blacks and choice of non-traditional gender roles. Part III discusses the ambiguity that many black women face as they assume these non-traditional gender roles and gives results of a pilot study that the author is presently conducting. Part IV discusses the areas where future research on the study of socialization and non-traditional gender roles of black women might be done. (Author/KH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED248294

SEP 0 1984

SOCIALIZATION AND NON-TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES: THE BLACK WOMAN

by
Dr. Yolanda T. Moses
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

DRAFT

Paper presented at the 1982 American Anthropological Association Meetings, Washington, D. C.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Yolanda T. Moses
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

UD023778

SOCIALIZATION AND NON-TRADITIONAL
GENDER ROLES: THE BLACK WOMAN

Introduction

> "Only through exploring the experience of supposedly 'ordinary' Black women whose 'unexceptional' actions enable us and the race to survive will we be able to begin to develop an overview and an analytical framework for understanding the lives of Afro-American women." (Hull and Smith 1982)

The above quote is from the introduction to the book, All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies. In the introduction to this anthology, the editors Hull, Scott and Smith discuss the need for scholars and researchers to look at the lives of Black women, not from the dominant white male-centered scholarship model but from the social and cultural perspective of Black women's lives and environments (Hull, Scott and Smith 1982:xxiv). To that end, this paper will explore socio-economic and cultural conditions that predispose Black women to choose paths to non-traditional gender roles and life choices more often than white women. In Part I, I will briefly review selected socialization literature on Blacks and raise questions as to the validity of using one single body of scholarship to explain the diversity (not deviance) of Black socialization patterns. Part II explores the direct relationships between socialization patterns for Blacks and choice of non-traditional gender roles. Part III discusses the ambiguity that many Black women face as they assume these

non-traditional gender roles and results of a pilot study that the author has been conducting will also be discussed. Part IV discusses the areas where future research on the study of socialization and non-traditional gender roles of Black women should be done.

I. Review of Socialization Literature: The Black Family and Socialization

When discussing socialization literature on the Black family, the arguments often arise as to the origins of Black family forms and socialization patterns. The two major arguments commonly referred to to explain the existence of a unique Black family structure are the "culture" and "class" arguments. The culture argument states that Black family structure is historically attributed to African retentions; it alleges that Blacks in the new world, despite the harrowing experiences of slavery, retained some of their deep-rooted African traditions. Features such as female autonomy, female headed households, and extended kinship households are attributed to the transatlantic placement of African traditions that continue to influence the family lives of Blacks (W. E. B. Dubois 1908 [1969]; M. J. Herskovits 1958; and Sudarkasa 1981). The "class" argument is based on the assumption that any African cultural traditions Blacks may have brought to the new world were destroyed by the institution of slavery that systematically dehumanized them and deprived them of

any remnants of a historical tradition. E. Franklin Frazier, a pioneer in the study of Black family history, denied any significant "survivals" from Africa. The Black family he wrote about in 1939 was the product of its adaptation to a racist and economically oppressive social structure. In his book, The Negro Family in the United States, he took the position that the ultimate goal of Black socialization and family life was to assimilate Blacks into mainstream American society (Frazier 1966 [1939]). The degree to which Blacks (both working and middle class) were unable to do this assimilation was the extent to which they had not adjusted or assimilated into American life.

Though this debate goes on in the literature on Black family studies, proving one position or the other is not as important as recognizing that Black family values and socialization patterns are a synthesis of African traditions as well as adaptation to the American socioeconomic system (Sudarkasa 1981:49). This historic debate has established some facts that cannot be denied; facts that support the position that Black women (especially working class) are socialized to be independent and self-reliant. They are raised to value themselves and to see their contributions to the family as worthy. This image of the Black woman is only now in the 1980s being recognized by some for what it is and what it has allowed the Black woman to accomplish, given her limitations within a male-dominated value-oriented society that excludes her because of her sex as well as her color.

In a critique of literature on socialization and the Black family, Peters blames some of the early assumptions of the research methods of the 1960s on Frazier's deficit oriented models. This research set up the negative social science models that portrayed the Black working class family as deviating from the norm because it was not a carbon copy of white middle families (Peters 1981:212). Particularly significant was the scathing attack made by social policy makers such as Daniel P. Moynihan (1965) who blamed the economic and social problems of Blacks (unemployment, illegitimacy, etc.) on the Black working class woman -- who actually took an active role in maintaining the family. This deficit model of the Black matriarchal family spawned over a decade of policy oriented research that shed light on what to do with the Black woman in the Black family to bring it back in line with "normal" white middle class families. Other than Joyce Ladner's Tomorrow's Tomorrow, most of the research of the late 1960s and early 1970s focused on low income Black families and interpersonal relations of Black males. It was through Black males that anthropologists like Ulf Hannerz (1969), Elliott Leibow (1966), and Roger Abrahams (1970) wrote their ethnographies on Black family life and interpersonal relationships -- with very few direct contacts with Black women. Not only was there a sex bias in this research, but it also made generalizations about a minority of the Black population that became generally accepted

as generalizations about all Black family life (Peters 1981:215). These ethnographies provided Americans with a picture of Black American family life, one in which Black women were strong, formidable figures that somehow got blamed for the plight of Black working class males.

The late 1970s saw the development of two new approaches to Black parent-child socialization theories: the ecological model and the cultural pluralism model (Peters 1981:216). In the ecological model, researchers tend to examine Black families and parent-child relations from a cultural specific or functional perspective rather than from one single (white middle class) ideological perspective. These research findings have dramatically changed the stereotypes surrounding the pathology formerly associated with Black family forms. These studies show that Black families encourage in their children the development of the skills, abilities and behaviors necessary to survive as competent adults in a racially oppressed society (Stack 1974; Aschenbrenner 1973; Peters 1981; and Willie 1976). Black families, both working class and middle class, are shown 1) to be strong, flexible and functional; 2) to provide a cultural environment that is different from that of Euro-Americans (especially notable is the socialization of girls and boys for egalitarian sex roles and the use of a more direct physical form of discipline in child rearing); and 3) Black children (both male and female) are

socialized into the dual but ~~normal~~ existence of being both Afro-American and Euro-American (Billingsley 1968; Hill 1971; Lewis 1975; Nobles 1974; and McAdoo 1981).

The cultural pluralism model observes differences in the behaviors of socialization across ethnic and cultural groups but attempts to avoid ethnocentric judgments by focusing on process. Ethnicity, race, education, and social class indicators are usually controlled for in these studies (Allen 1978 and Peters 1981). These studies have shown the richness and variation of parent-child communication, parental teaching styles and parental attitudes (Peters 1981; Carew et. al. 1976; and Zegiob and Forehand 1975). Because these kinds of studies involve small samples, there is rich descriptive data to show that the socialization of Black children is a changing dynamic phenomenon; constantly responding to the internal and external stimuli of the Black experience in America. One important finding by Scanzoni (1971) shows that Black working class families prepare their children to be upwardly mobile via anticipatory socialization; and that many working class families identify with middle class values even though they have not achieved this status for themselves.

At this point, we should note the differences between the socialization of Black female children at the working class and

middle class levels and the implication of this socialization on non-traditional gender roles. McAdoo (1981) observes that in Black families that are upwardly mobile, and where this upward mobility is continued in the second and third generation, that women tend to be less educated and less likely to work outside the home. This seems to indicate that, at least for some Blacks, the role of the Black woman as central female figure or egalitarian partner in the household is giving over to a more mainstream model of what the "middle class" woman should be. The implications of this shift for some Black women will be discussed in detail in the next section.

In summary, Black child rearing attitudes and patterns of behavior have developed out of the unique economic, cultural and racial circumstances in which they have lived. As Peters summarizes, "mainstream America and its social scientists have become aware of the reality in American life that Blacks cannot long forget that this is a cultural pluralistic country and the historical roots of its multiethnic people are varying, valuable and strong" (Peters 1981:221).

II. Socialization and Non-traditional Gender Roles

Janice Hale (1980) mentions the duality associated with the socialization of Black children. She contends they are prepared

to imitate the behavior of the culture in which they live (Black culture) and at the same time take on those behaviors that are needed in order to be upwardly mobile (Hale 1980:82). Black women tend to be prepared to choose non-traditional gender roles more often than white women because they are socialized to be flexible and achievement oriented. Mothers want their children (both boys and girls) to excel white children in performance and behavior because falling short would reflect unfavorably on Blacks as a group (Hill 1972). In a study of older Black women who were domestic workers, Dill (1980) found that while these women did not have even a high school education "they encouraged the children to get an education in order to get a better job. Precisely what those jobs would be was left open to be resolved through the interaction of their sons' or daughters' own luck, skill, perseverance, and the overall position of the job market vis-a-vis Black currents" (Dill 1980:113). This kind of study is representative of the encouragement that has been given to girls not only to get an education and go to school, but to choose a job or occupation that will give them some livelihood, status, and opportunity for upward mobility.

Black women tend to choose gender roles, especially public ones like professional occupations, community leadership roles, and politics for several reasons: 1) to fill a void, 2) for moralistic and humanitarian reasons, and 3) for improvement of personal and/or familial social and economic conditions.

The literature is replete with studies, narratives and images of Black women as strong, dominant matriarchs (Tenhouten 1970; Moynihan 1965; and Abrahams 1970). In reality these women are just taking charge of their families and their lives because they have been socialized to do so and because the males in their lives in the role of husband/father in many instances are unable to do so. The history of slavery and its aftermath of caste-like racism has worked to still keep the majority of Blacks at the lowest rung of the economic ladder. While there are some economic gains being made by upwardly mobile Blacks, the majority of Black women are working because they must, not because they want to. A recent study of the role orientations of young Black women by Engram shows that when socioeconomic status is held constant Black and white women conform to the same cultural ideals and "unlike many sociological theories suggest, Black women do not have stronger career orientation or weaker homemaking orientations at their point of entry into adulthood." (Engram 1980: 185) This data supports the notion that there may very well be role conflict involved in the primacy of labor force participation over marital relations (at least among young women); but many Black women are resigned and equipped to play the joint role of homemaker and career woman.

Another reason women choose non-traditional gender roles is to pursue the continuing moral and humanistic quest for dignity.

Many Black women choose gender roles that put them in the public eye (i.e., as community leaders) to try and change the plight of racism and poverty for their people. Gilkes' in-depth study of women active in Black community affairs found these women to feel that they were carrying out a moral obligation to help their community. They are, through their good works, given the mandates and license to speak for their community; these women are valued because they are able to take up issues in which Black men cannot or will not get involved. Gilkes speaks of the special status of these community women as spokespersons to the outside larger white society:

> The fact that they are honored, that their work is routine, and that the work has the characteristic of an occupation provides insight into the nature and persuasiveness of racism and its consequence in Hamptonville's Black community. The women stand out as a separate group from men engaged in community work. This separation indicates the special constraints in American society on outspoken Black men and the special effects of racism on survival issues concerning women. (Gilkes 1980:227)

She contends issues like housing, violence, employment, education, health and legal problems are often the catalysts that project women into non-traditional gender roles. Again, the socialization for flexibility and survival are at work to insure that capable Blacks both male and female are struggling to provide a decent environment for themselves and their children. It

is no coincidence that many of these women go on to seek paid political office as a result of their strong grass-roots support.

Black women also take on non-traditional gender roles for personal achievement and upper mobility. Those Black women who have the educational and interpersonal skills to take advantage of equal opportunity and affirmative action programs are also moving into non-traditional occupations and professions. They want for themselves and their families the status and income that correlate with their chosen professions. In the next section I will discuss the conflicts inherent in the roles that Black women play as minorities and women in traditionally white male status roles.

III. Status Role Ambiguity: The Black Female Professional

The dynamics of racism and sexism place Black women in what Epstein (1973) has called the "double bind"; they share the economic discrimination patterns in this society based on both race and sex. Socioeconomic history has shown some similarities between the struggle of both Black and white women for sexual equality. However, even at the middle class and upper class levels, a greater percentage of Black women than white women work after marriage and childbirth. Lerner (1973) notes that for the majority of middle and upper class white women the decision to

pursue a career is optional, but Black women are raised with the expectation that whether or not they marry, whether or not they have children, they may have to work all of their adult lives. Work is an imposed necessity (Lerner 1973). In her study of Black professional women, Leggon (1980) also found that most of the women she interviewed in her study were able to cope with the demands of both the "traditional female role" and their professional or "career roles." She notes that Black professional women are able to live rather comfortably with these dual roles because "1) having adult female members of the household working has been historically and continues to be a more usual experience for Blacks than for whites, and 2) work for the Black woman is not an option, but a necessity if her family is to maintain its precarious middle class status" (Leggon 1980:197).

Other research shows that the problems of Black professional women have little to do with career-family choices, but rather have to do with the racism and sexism that are experienced in the work place that often threaten their sense of self-worth. For example, they are often treated as if the stereotypes about them are true; particularly the stereotypes of Black women as strong matriarchs and superwomen. Dumas (1980) contends that Black women in leadership positions are victims of the resurrection of the Black mammy syndrome:

> Myths of the superiority of Black women over white women and Black men, their tremendous power and strength ... prompt others to press them into symbolic roles that circumscribe the nature and scope of their functions ... The Black woman leader is often torn between the expectations and demands born of her mythical image and those that are inherent in her official status and tasks in the formal organization. (Dumas 1980:207)

As a result of this continued stereotyping, Black professionals are often called upon to use their interpersonal skills rather than their formal leadership skills. They are often expected to perform duties beyond what is expected of their formal job descriptions. They are found frequently comforting the weary and oppressed, interceding on behalf of those who feel abused, and championing the cause of equality and justice -- often alone (Dumas 1980).

Another major complaint of Black women professionals is that they are often not taken seriously or, worse yet, they are totally rejected. Leggon reported that many of the Black women professionals in her sample had trouble getting started in their careers where they had to depend on their clients "choosing" them for service. She relates the story of one young lawyer who loses a potential client:

> A woman obtained my name from the American Bar Association and sent her husband to me. He knew that I was a woman, but when he arrived and I introduced myself and he saw that I was Black, he said, 'I knew

> you were a woman, but this is too much,' and he turned and left. (Leggon 1980:195)

In the research that I am conducting on a sample of Black and Mexican American women, I have also found that ethnic women who want to assume non-traditional roles have many obstacles to overcome. One of my informants wanted to start her own janitorial business, but had to use a man as a "front":

> I knew that after presenting myself to several prospective contractors they were not taking me seriously either because I was Black or because I was a woman. After some weeks of rejection, I finally called back to talk to one of the contractors and he told me, off the record, that his company did not believe a woman could do the job. Well, after that I started to take my brother with me -- and I began to get the contracts. I learned fast.

Although there are federal and state laws against racial and sexual discrimination, there are subtle forms of discrimination that are devastating because they work on one's self-esteem. Perhaps one of the most devastating forms of rejection is the one experienced by Black women who are perceived as "good affirmative action hires" -- that is, they are both female and Black. Another of my informants who has an advanced degree, university teaching experience, and owns a small business talks about how she felt like so much "meat" when she got her first teaching assignment:

> You know, my so-called colleagues never asked about my research interests or my degree or any of my professional training experiences. They knew that I was an affirmative action hire, and therefore assumed that I was not competent to teach, but only hired because I was a Black woman. Initially, I was totally ignored.

Examples like the ones mentioned above are indicative of the effects of the double negative role that Black women face -- especially when they go into non-traditional areas. The problem does not appear to be with the Black woman adjusting to non-traditional gender roles but rather with a society that is in a state of flux regarding traditional sex roles and appropriate attitudes toward race and ethnicity. Black women continue to feel the brunt of this flux at the institutional and informal levels of their lives. While many of them do cope with the situation, for some it may lead to health problems, stress and depression. These pressures ironically enough end up causing some of these so-called superwomen to experience impairment in interpersonal relationships and job performance. Carrington (1980) has found in her study of depression among successful women in lucrative professions that they still suffer from feelings of unworthiness and despair. She suggests that these feelings come from the interplay of racism and sexism in their lives and suggests that more research needs to be done on the causes of depression in Black women. One of my informants sums up the plight of Black women quite nicely:

> When I grew up, I was told I had to learn how to take care of myself and help with the family. I went to school and got a good education. I was told I had to be smarter in school than the white kids, and I did that, too. When I graduated from college, I got a job and tried to work my way up in the company -- but I find all of the hard work, diligent effort and sacrifice does not help; I am still just a dumb, Black woman to them.

IV. Summary and Suggestions for Future Research

Black families socialize their children, both boys and girls, to be flexible and to function in both Black and white mainstream communities. Some Black women in particular have a difficult time adapting to mainstream cultural values that denigrate their capabilities as Blacks and as females. Though there have been some legal gains made by both the civil rights, Black Power, and women's movements in the last decade, cultural attitudes, behavioral patterns and belief systems that treat Black women as invisible are still operative. As a consequence, some Black women tend to experience stress, depression and in some cases despair. They are socialized to cope -- but the rules of the game seem to keep changing. Just when Blacks and women have reached the level of a professional class in significant numbers, they find that in terms of attitudes nothing has really changed. Women at top executive levels are reported to experience despair similar to that experienced by uneducated working class Black women.

Though I have raised some important issues in this paper, there is much more research to be done. I would like to see more research done in the area of the uses of family support systems and non-family support networks for upwardly mobile Black women; the salience of race vs. sex as categories of identity; and the relationship between racism, sexism and depression among both working and middle class Black women. In addition, whether as Black women become more upwardly mobile are they socializing their female children in the mores and values of traditional white America or are they still clinging to their traditional socialization patterns. The answers to some of these questions may not be readily forthcoming -- but to seek their answers is to try to understand the convergence of racist and sexist ideologies and how they are manifest in American culture. That is no small task.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrahams, Roger D.
1970 Deep Down in the Jungle. Chicago Avenue.

Allen, W. R.
1978 "The Search for Applicable Theories in Black Family Life," Journal of Marriage and the Family 40 (February): 117-129.

Aschenbrenner, Joyce
1973 Lifelines: Black Families in Chicago. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Billingsly, A.
1968 Black Families in White America. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Carew, J. V., with Chan and C. Halfer
1976 Observing Intelligence in Young Children. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Carrington, Christine H.
1980 "Depression in Black Women: A Theoretical Appraisal," The Black Woman. La Frances Rodgers Rose, editor. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 265-271.

Dill, Bonnie Thornton
1980 "'The Means to Put my Children Through': Childrearing Goals and Strategies Among Black Female Domestic Servants," The Black Woman. La Frances Rodgers Rose, editor. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 107-123.

Dubois, W. E. B.
1969 The Negro American Family. New York: New American Library (originally published 1908).

Dumas, Rhetaugh Graves
1980 "Dilemmas of Black Females in Leadership," The Black Woman. La Frances Rodgers Rose, editor. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 203-215.

Engram, Eleanor
1980 "Role Transition in Early Adulthood: Orientations of Young Black Women," The Black Woman. La Frances Rodgers Rose, editor. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 175-187.

Epstein, C. F.
1973 "Black and Female, The Double Whammy," Psychology Today (August) 57-61, 89.

Frazier, E. Franklin
1966 The Negro Family in the United States. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (originally published in 1939).

Gilkes, Cheryl Townsend
1980 "Holding Back the Ocean with a Broom: Black Women and Community Work," The Black Woman. La Frances Rodgers Rose, editor. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 217-231.

Hale, Janice
1980 "The Black Woman and Child Rearing," The Black Woman. La Frances Rodgers Rose, editor. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 79-87.

Hannerz, Ulf
1969 Soulside: Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community. New York: Columbia University Press.

Herskovits, M. J.
1958 The Myth of the Negro Past. Boston: Beacon Press (originally published 1949).

Hill, R.
1971 The Strengths of Black Families. New York: National Urban League.

Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith, editors
1982 All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, but Some of Us are Brave: Black Women's Studies. Old Westbury: The Feminist Press.

Ladner, Joyce
1971 Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman. Garden City: Doubleday.

Leggon, Cheryl Bernadette
1980 "Black Female Professionals: Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status," The Black Woman. La Frances Rodgers Rose, editor. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 189-202.

Leibow, Elliott
1966 Talley's Corner. Boston: Little Brown

Lerner, Gerder
1973 Black Women in White America: A Documentary History. New York: Vintage Press.

Lewis, D.
1975 "The Black Family: Socialization and Sex Roles," Phylon 26 (fall): 471-480.

McAdoo, Hariette Pipes
1981 "Patterns of Upward Mobility in Black Families," Black Families. Harriette Pipes McAdoo, editor. Beverly Hills: Sage Productions. pp. 155-169.

McAdoo, John
1981 "Involvement of Fathers in the Socialization of Black Children," Black Families. Edited by Hariette Pipes McAdoo. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 225-237.

Moynihan, Daniel P.
1965 The Negro Family: A Case for National Action. Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office.

Nobles, Wade
1974 "African Root and American Fruit: The Black Family," Journal of Behavioral and Social Sciences 20 (spring): 66-77.

Peters, Marie F.
1981 "Parenting in Black Families with Young Children: An Historical Overview," Black Families, edited by Harriette Pipes McAdoo. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 211-224.

Scanzoni, J.
1971 The Black Family in Modern Society. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Stack, Carol
1974 All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community. New York: Harper and Row.

Sudarkasa, Niara
1981 "Interpreting the African Heritage in Afro-American Family Organization," Black Families, edited by Harriette Pipes McAdoo. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 37-53.

Tenhouten, W. D.
1970 "The Black Family: Myth and Reality," Psychiatry. pp. 145-155.

Willie, C. V.
1976 A New Look at Black Families. New Bayside, New York: General Hall.

Zegiob, L. and R. Forehand
1975 "Maternal Interactive Behavior as a Function of Race: Socioeconomic Status and the Sex of the Child," Child Development 46:564-568.